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Viewing cable 05PORTAUPRINCE1487, HAITIAN PRIVATE SECTOR PANICKED BY INCREASING

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- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05PORTAUPRINCE1487	2005-05-27 19:47	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Port Au Prince

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume4-52/La%20nomination%20de%20Gousse.asp>
<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume4-52/Bernard%20Gousse.asp>

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PORT AU PRINCE 001487

SIPDIS

WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEPT FOR DS/IP/WHA
DS/DSS/ITA
DSERCC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2014
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [ECON](#) [EWWT](#)
SUBJECT: HAITIAN PRIVATE SECTOR PANICKED BY INCREASING
VIOLENCE

REF: A. PAP 1373
[1](#)B. PAP 1027

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Foley, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Fritz Mevs, a member of one of Haiti's richest families and a well-connected member of the private sector elite, told Poloff on May 13 that business leaders are exasperated by the lack of security in the vital port and industrial zone areas of Port-au-Prince and are allegedly arming local police with long-guns and ammunition in an effort to ensure security for their businesses and employees. Kidnappings and carjackings are frightening Haiti's small but critical cadre of mid-level employees who work in the industrial park and port, and workers have threatened to strike unless the security situation improves, Mevs said. (Note: This area is either off-limits or LAV-travel only for the embassy. End Note.) Mevs said that the recent killing of gang leader Labanieri is part of the problem, as he used to keep rival gangs out of the area. Mevs also said private sector protests against the IGOH for the lack of security were misguided and called for a media campaign to mobilize opposition against what he described as the true scourge of Haiti: a cabal of drug-traffickers, Haitian elite and IGOH insiders conspiring with gangs and corrupt cops to undermine peace and democracy in the country. In response to embassy and private sector prodding, MINUSTAH is now formulating a plan to protect the area. End summary.

Background

12. (C) Fritz Mevs is a prominent member of one of Haiti's richest families. He leads a group of local investors who own and operate in Port-au-Prince the Terminal of Varreux (the private terminal that handles 30% of Haiti's imports), the petroleum storage of WINECO (which encompasses Haiti's largest propane gas storage center) and the SHODECOSA Warehouse Complex (where, among other things, 90% of the humanitarian cargo donated to Haiti is stored). The Mevs family has always enjoyed financial control of important Haitian economic assets and has shown an ability to roll with (and have influence upon) any government that allows them to exploit those assets.

Port Area Suffering from Insecurity

13. (C) Mevs told Poloff on May 13 that the security situation in and around the port and industrial zone area was untenable. The district is surrounded by the gang havens of Bel Air, La Saline and Cite Soleil, and kidnappers and carjackers target traffic along the vital transport link (Route Nationale #1) between the port and the Industrial Park. Mevs said the crime threat has already forced several businesses to close (including the Embassy's GSO operations), while employees of others are threatening to strike unless the security situation improves. Among those Mevs cited as caught in the midst of the "urban warfare" are: CEMEX, TOTAL, DINHASA, TEXACO, MADSEN Import-Export, SOGENER, and others. Mevs said absenteeism among employees is at an all-time high and the flow of essential commodities (oil, gasoline, cement, rice, steel, etc.) transiting through the facility is adversely affected. Continued disruption, he said, will soon result in shortages, inflation, and potentially a collapse in support for the transition government. (Note: The Director General of the National Port Authority has separately confirmed Mevs account of the situation outside of the port. While security inside the port is acceptable, just outside of the gates criminals operate freely. Gunfire is common and workers fear for their lives going to and from work every day. He said MINUSTAH, while present, does not provide any real security for employees going into or out of the port. End Note.)

14. (C) Mevs showed Poloff a pile of letters sent from the Terminal authority and several of its members to MINUSTAH SRSR Valdes, Prime Minister Latortue, HNP Director General Leon Charles, and Minister of Justice Gousse over the last two months. The letters describe a lengthy list of incidents and vulnerabilities - including pipeline sabotage, criminal fires, shots fired at offloading vessels, kidnappings and murders - and solicit additional, permanent security, often in quite desperate language ("we may not hold on for long"). The Terminal's large army of security staff are outgunned by the heavy weapons fired by the bandits, the letters say, and must stand helplessly at the gate, unable to intervene when those entering or exiting are hijacked, robbed, shot and at times, killed, outside the jurisdiction of the Terminal fences. According to Mevs, although MINUSTAH has on occasion parked armored vehicles near the Terminal with some success, he said criminals regularly force the tanks to move (by burning tires or fecal matter nearby), and as soon as the vehicles depart, the rampage continues.

15. (C) Other embassy contacts confirm Mevs' description of the deteriorated security situation in the port area. A political advisor to the Mayor of Cite Soleil told Poloff on May 17 that MINUSTAH was proving to be a poor substitute for Labaniere, the gang leader from the Boston neighborhood of Cite Soleil closest to the industrial zone who was killed on March 30, allegedly in a plot directed by rival pro-Lavalas gang leader Dread Wilme. The advisor said that Labaniere (who reportedly received money from businesses in the district for protection) managed to defend the commercial zone in a way that periodic MINUSTAH checkpoints have not. He said bandits were undaunted by UN vehicles sometimes parked along Route Nationale #1 and that MINUSTAH troops (who, he said, rarely set foot outside of their vehicles) were unable to identify the bandits from amongst the general populace as Labaniere had done.

16. (C) Meanwhile, a MINUSTAH official told Poloff on May 18 that the Cite Soleil operation begun on March 31 was indeed weakening due to Brazilian and Jordanian troop rotations that could last 4-8 weeks. Permanent checkpoints along Route Nationale and other areas surrounding Cite Soleil have been replaced by rotating outposts concentrated primarily north of the commercial district, leaving much of the area described by Mevs unprotected. Another MINUSTAH commander confirmed on May 20 that UN troops were drawing down, to be replaced by a joint HNP-CIVPOL strategy that would effectively block a critical section of the highway to all vehicular traffic (septel).

Embassy Port-au-Prince's Response

17. (C) Charge met with UNSRSG Valdes on May 14 to encourage him to dramatically increase MINUSTAH's security presence in the area. Valdes seemed genuinely surprised that the situation was so acute. Following the meeting Charge encouraged the French ambassador to reiterate our message with Valdes. In response Valdes instructed MINUSTAH military and CIVPOL leaders to develop a plan in coordination with the private sector, who rejected an initial proposal as unworkable. On May 19 Ambassador Foley wrote to Ambassador Valdes to protest three examples of MINUSTAH passivity in response to violence against American citizens. Ambassador Foley again underscored the need for a swift, aggressive response to criminal elements in a conversation with Valdes on May 20. Valdes thanked the Ambassador for the concrete examples described in the Ambassador's letter. He said that he had often heard reports but never had details with which he could confront MINUSTAH military and police leaders. Valdes promised a more robust response from MINUSTAH. Separately, a MINUSTAH military officer reported to the Core Group on May 20 that they were preparing to present another strategy to business representatives on May 21. Ambassador Foley warned the Core Group that MINUSTAH's stand-down in Cite Soleil put the elections at risk, and that the insecurity around the industrial zone risked undermining what is left of the Haitian economy.

Private Sector Arming the Police

18. (C) In response to MINUSTAH's unresponsiveness, Mevs said, a group of merchants from the Terminal conducted an unofficial survey of the HNP's weapons inventory and requirements. The report (on official HNP letterhead indicating some form of HNP cooperation in the effort) suggests, for example, that the Port-au-Prince station has (2) M-14s, (2) T-65s, and (2) M-1s, and needed (6) M-14s, (8) T-65s, and (4) Galils. (Note: Embassy has not independently confirmed any of the numbers from the report. End note). The undated report shows the HNP has the following country-wide inventory:

- (65) 12-gauge rifles
- (11) M-14
- (15) T-65
- (15) M-1
- 82 functioning vehicles
- 179 radios

and the following needs:

- (200) T-65
- (127) galils
- (120) M-14
- (43) M-1
- (73) 12-gauge rifles
- 160 vehicles
- 249 radios

19. (C) Mevs said some business owners have already begun to purchase weapons and ammunition from the street and distribute them to local police officials in exchange for regular patrols. Mevs claimed, for example, that Reginald Boulos, President of the Haitian Chamber of Commerce, had already distributed arms to the police and had called on others to do so in order to provide cover to his own actions. Mevs says that of the roughly 150 business owners in the area, probably 30 have already provided some kind of direct assistance (including arms, ammunition, or other materiel) to the police, and the rest are looking to do so soon. Contacts of the Econ Counselor report from time to time of discussions among private sector leaders to fund and arm their own private sector armies. The AmCham Board of Directors at one point discussed informally giving non-lethal assistance to police stations, such as furniture and microwave ovens for police stations, but decided against doing so for fear that anything given to the police would quickly be stolen.

110. (C) Mevs defended the idea of the private sector arming the police in general, but he lamented the haphazard manner in which many of his colleagues seemed to be handing out weapons with little control. He said they were "wasting their money" by giving arms to police without knowing if they were "dirty or clean" and with no measures in place to make sure the arms were not simply re-sold. He also complained that funneling the arms secretly would only serve to reinforce rumors that the elite were creating private armies. Mevs said he was approaching the Embassy in order to find a way for these private sector initiatives to be incorporated into established inventory and control systems within the HNP. He described his conception of a program in which the private sector could purchase guns and ammunition on the open market and turn the equipment over to the HNP in exchange for a receipt and a guarantee that a certain number of

appropriately-armed HNP would be assigned to a requested area. He said, however, that he did not trust either MINUSTAH or the HNP to properly control the issuance of weapons and hoped that the U.S. would oversee the program.

Haiti's "new enemy"

11. (C) In response to the May 11 protest (supported by some private sector leaders such as Charles Baker) to demand that the IGOH address the security situation, Mevs said their target was wrong. He said protesters should mobilize against Haiti's real enemy and the true source of insecurity: a small nexus of drug-dealers and political insiders that control a network of dirty cops and gangs that not only were responsible for committing the kidnappings and murders, but were also frustrating the efforts of well-meaning government officials and the international community to confront them. He asserted, for example, that some incidents were engineered specifically to frustrate efforts by the IGOH to secure a weapons export license waiver from the Department of State. Mevs claimed that Colombian drug-traffickers (and allegedly the brother of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez) had allied with a small cabal of powerful and connected individuals, including Youri Latortue, Gary Lissade, lawyer Andre Pasquet, Michel Brunache (Chief of Staff to President Alexandre), Jean Mosanto Petit (aka Toto Borlette, owner of the unofficial Haitian lottery and large swaths of Port-au-Prince property), and Dany Toussaint, to create a criminal enterprise that thrives on - and generates - instability. (Note: We have no corroborating information linking Brunache to drug-trafficking. He, along with Latortue, Pasquet, and Justice Minister Gousse. all worked in Gary Lissade's law firm.)

12. (C) Mevs suggested that some recent kidnappings (including that of Dr. Michel Theard - ref B) were actually targeted crimes meant to send a message to the people within the IGOH that the network was calling the shots. (Comment: This obviously contradicts his claim that IGOH insiders are involved. End Comment.) Mevs claimed that Dr. Theard had been passed between several supposedly independent gangs, thereby illustrating how the gangs were actually joined together by a "central node." It was against this network, Mevs argued, that well-meaning Haitians should direct their ire, and he called for a mass popular mobilization against this unnamed (but apparently obvious) cabal: the "new common enemy following the departure of President Aristide."

Comment

13. (C) Fritz Mevs undoubtedly has a strong personal interest in convincing us that the port district is in danger and he is no doubt biased against those individuals he names who work against his interests. Mevs himself is a core member of what might easily be described as a rival network of influence competing for control of Haiti against the cast of characters he has described. Furthermore, it is impossible to imagine that Mevs has managed to protect his interests over the years without making some accommodation with potentially hostile government principals and the associated gang leaders at his doorstep (indeed his silence on Aristide's continuing role in the violence is curious). While we cannot confirm whether the alleged cabal of political insiders allied with South American narco-traffickers is controlling the gangs, we have seen indications of alliances between drug dealers, criminal gangs and political forces that could threaten to make just such a scenario possible via the election of narco-funded politicians, unless we are able to severely disrupt the flow of drugs into and out of Haiti. One thing is clear: it is vital that our plan to equip the HNP through strict controls go forward immediately. In the meantime, we will deliver strong messages to Charles and the IGOH (and our private sector contacts) against private delivery of arms to the HNP. End Comment.

FOLEY